

STATE OF VERMONT  
PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION

Case No. 19-0441-TF

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Tariff filing of Green Mountain Power Corporation for net-metering transmission ground-fault overvoltage (“TGFOV”) fee and new generation resource rider on bills rendered on or after July 1, 2019	
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Order entered: 07/01/2019

**ORDER APPROVING TARIFF AND ACCOUNTING ORDER**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

In today’s Order the Vermont Public Utility Commission (the “Commission”) approves a transmission ground-fault overvoltage (“TGFOV”) fee and new generation resource rider proposed by Green Mountain Power Corporation (“GMP”).<sup>1</sup> The Commission also approves an accounting guidance that allows GMP to apply the fees collected to the cost of TGFOV mitigation.

**II. PROCEDURAL HISTORY**

On February 8, 2019, GMP filed a tariff with the Commission that would establish a fee of \$75 per kilowatt (AC) for net-metering and other generation projects interconnecting to certain distribution networks that GMP has identified as requiring system upgrades to address TGFOV conditions. The filing consisted of an amendment to GMP’s Self-Generation and Net Metering tariff as well as a new Generation Resource System Upgrade Rider (collectively, the “tariff”). GMP requested that the tariff take effect on March 25, 2019. The tariff was provided to the Vermont Department of Public Service (the “Department”) through the Commission’s electronic case management system, ePUC, at the time of GMP’s filing.

On February 22, 2019, the Commission issued information requests to GMP.

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<sup>1</sup> In an order dated March 15, 2019, the Commission appointed two Hearing Officers to hear this case. Pursuant to 3 V.S.A. § 811, the Commission has read the record of this proceeding and is rendering its decision. Accordingly, this decision has not been circulated for comment by the parties. As usual, the parties have 28 days to file requests for reconsideration pursuant to Vermont Rule of Civil Procedure 59(e).

On March 4, 2019, GMP filed responses to those requests.<sup>2</sup>

On March 4, 2019, Renewable Energy Vermont (“REV”) filed a motion to intervene in this proceeding on a permissive basis.

On March 11, 2019, the Department recommended that the Commission suspend the effectiveness of the tariff and open an investigation. Pursuant to 30 V.S.A. § 225, the Commission adopted the Department’s recommendation and opened an investigation, suspending GMP’s tariff filing pending a final determination.

On March 14, 2019, GMP responded that it had no objection to REV’s Motion to Intervene.

On March 15, 2019, the Department responded that it had no objection to REV’s intervention.

On March 20, 2019, the Commission issued an Order granting REV party status as a permissive intervenor pursuant to Commission Rule 2.209(B).

On March 25, 2019, All Earth Renewables, Inc. (“All Earth”) moved to intervene.

On March 28, 2019, the Commission held a prehearing conference. Appearances were entered by Carolyn Browne Anderson for GMP, David J. Mullett for All Earth, and Alexander Wing for the Department. At the prehearing conference, both GMP and the Department stated that they had no objection to All Earth’s participation in this proceeding. A schedule was adopted by Commission Order entered April 1, 2019.

On April 9, 2019, All Earth’s intervention motion was granted.

On April 16, 2019, the Department and REV each submitted information requests to GMP.

On April 19, 2019, the Town of Fair Haven filed public comments with the Commission stating its concern with grid conditions in Fair Haven.

On April 24, 2019, GMP responded by letter to Fair Haven’s comment.

On April 26, 2019, GMP provided responses to the Department’s and REV’s Information Requests.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> On April 10, 2019, GMP provided the Commission an exhibit that had been omitted in error from the March 4 response.

<sup>3</sup> GMP’s responses to the Department’s and REV’s information requests were filed in ePUC on April 29 and June 18, 2019.

On May 16, 2019, GMP and REV filed with the Commission a Memorandum of Understanding (“MOU”) that incorporates a revised tariff with a reduced fee of \$37/kW, reporting requirements, and other provisions for implementing the tariff.

Also on May 16, 2019, the Department filed the direct testimony of Edward McNamara and Scott Wheeler. The Department proposed an alternative fee of \$25/kW.

Also on May 16, 2019, All Earth requested an opportunity to comment on the revised tariff and MOU. The Department supported All Earth’s request.

On May 22, 2019, All Earth filed comments on the revised tariff and MOU. All Earth recommended that the costs associated with TGFOV upgrades be borne by ratepayers because they are the collective beneficiaries of Vermont’s renewable energy laws and policies. All Earth argued that socializing such costs is consistent with Vermont’s approach to renewable energy. All Earth did not request an evidentiary hearing or oral argument.

Also on May 22, 2019, GMP filed comments responding to the Department’s alternative \$25/kW fee proposal.

On May 31, 2019, the Department filed a response to GMP’s May 22, 2019, filing and All Earth’s May 22, 2019, comments. The Department did not oppose the implementation of the \$37/kW fee amount included in the tariff filed with the MOU on May 16, 2019. The Department opposed All Earth’s recommendation to socialize the cost of system upgrades on the grounds that All Earth’s recommendation is “contrary to Vermont Statute, Commission Rules, precedent, and is unfairly disproportionate to the benefit rate payers would receive from bearing such a cost.”

On June 5 and 6, 2019, GMP filed comments responding to the Department’s May 31, 2019, comments, and proposed minor revisions to the tariff to implement the MOU. GMP also stated that it “will include any necessary revision regarding the non-bypassable nature of the charge at the same time net metering tariff revisions on similar issues are due based upon the Commission’s Order in Case No. 18-1633-PET.”

Also on June 5, 2019, All Earth filed reply comments responding to GMP’s May 31, 2019, comments.

On June 6, 2019, the Department filed supplemental comments recommending that the TGFOV fee be identified as a “non-bypassable charge” to the extent that it is collected on net-metering customer’s bills.

On June 11, 2019, the Hearing Officers issued information requests.

On June 18, 2019, GMP filed responses to the Hearing Officers' information requests.

No other filings were received.

No party has requested an evidentiary hearing or objected to the prefiled testimony and exhibits. Accordingly, the following prefiled testimony and exhibits are admitted as if presented at a hearing: GMP's proposed tariff revisions filed June 5 and 6, 2019 (the proposed "Tariff")<sup>4</sup>; the MOU; the prefiled testimony of Josh Castonguay filed May 16, 2019; GMP's Responses to the Commission's information requests and all attachments, filed on March 4 and June 18, 2019; GMP's Comments filed on May 22 and June 5, 2019, and all attachments; the Department's Comments filed on May 31 and June 6, 2019, and all attachments; Letter from Josh Castonguay to Judith Whitney, Clerk of the Commission, dated February 8, 2019 ("Castonguay Letter"); GMP's Discovery Responses to REV and Department Information Requests and all attachments filed on April 29 and June 18, 2019; Exhibit GMP A10 Final; the direct prefiled testimony of Edward McNamara and Scott Wheeler; and Exhibits DPS-SGW 1 and 2.<sup>5</sup>

### **III. TGFOV FEE AND NEW GENERATION RESOURCE RIDER**

#### **A. Findings**

1. The potential for TGFOV often requires system upgrades that would be cost-prohibitive for a single or small net-metering or generation project to undertake. GMP estimates that the average TGFOV upgrade cost at any given substation is approximately \$75,000. Castonguay Letter at 2.

2. GMP's tariff would assess a one-time fee of \$37/kW on all Commission Rule 5.100 and 5.500<sup>6</sup> interconnections submitted following the tariff's approval that are proposed to interconnect to distribution networks that either require or have the potential to require TGFOV. Projects that have an active application or registration on hold prior to the effective date of the

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<sup>4</sup> GMP also filed proposed revisions to its tariffs on February 8 and May 16, 2019. These documents were superseded by the June 5 and 6, 2019 tariff revisions.

<sup>5</sup> Not all the filings were submitted as "prefiled testimony" or "exhibits." If any party objects to the admission of any of these documents, the party must file its objection within 14 days of the date this order is entered.

<sup>6</sup> Commission Rule 5.100 is the rule pertaining to the construction and operation of net-metering systems. Commission Rule 5.500 provides the interconnection procedures for proposed electric generation resources.

tariff due to a TGFOV constraint will be allowed to continue the interconnection process by paying the fee. MOU at 2.

3. The 67 substations covered by the tariffed fee are identified in an attachment to the MOU and will be identified on the GMP Solar Map located on GMP's website:

<http://gmp.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=4eaec2b58c4c4820b24c408a95e8956>. MOU at 3.

4. GMP is now seeking a tariff effective date of July 1, 2019. The fee would apply to all projects submitting a certificate of public good ("CPG") application on or after the effective date. Projects that applied for a CPG on a constrained TGFOV circuit before the effective date will have the choice of paying the tariff fee or paying the actual cost of the entire TGFOV upgrade. All projects that are currently on hold due to TGFOV will be able to pay the tariff fee and move forward. MOU at 2.

5. For projects interconnecting to the circuits of the 67 substations at issue, projects 15 kW and smaller may interconnect after completing the Commission process for project approval, unless GMP files an objection during the registration process stating that the project would cause the load-to-generation ratio for the circuit at issue to be lower than 1.5:1. Projects 15 kW and smaller will be required to pay the tariffed fee on their first electric bill following their interconnection. Projects with a capacity of more than 15 kW may interconnect after: (1) payment of the tariffed fee (unless the fee is to be collected on the customer's bill); (2) completion of the Commission process for project approval; and (3) for projects on a circuit currently identified as TGFOV constrained, upon completion of the TGFOV upgrade. MOU at 3; GMP June 18, 2019, Response to Commission Information Request at 4.

6. On a semi-annual basis (January 31 and July 31) GMP will provide to REV and the Department a schedule of upcoming TGFOV upgrades. The MOU states that there is currently a backlog of projects affected by TGFOV constraints awaiting upgrades. GMP expects to prioritize existing project upgrades using the criteria of (1) the number of projects currently on hold that are on a particular transmission network awaiting a TGFOV upgrade; and (2) the total kW awaiting interconnection on a particular transmission network due to a TGFOV upgrade. GMP will begin upgrades for these backlogged projects as soon as the tariff is approved, without

waiting for a fee balance to accumulate, and will make best efforts to complete these existing upgrades within 12 months upon approval of this tariff. MOU at 3-4.

7. Because of the number of projects already awaiting an upgrade, the MOU notes that it will take GMP time to complete the backlog. Once this set of projects clears, GMP expects and will make best efforts to accomplish upgrades within six months of a TGFOV upgrade becoming necessary, though many factors (including weather, storm damage, number of projects proposed, and other engineering and construction work required) affect GMP's ability to complete any particular project. MOU at 4.

8. On an annual basis, GMP will provide to REV and the Department a report of all TGFOV upgrades with cost data, itemized by materials and labor, as well as the total TGFOV fees collected from all projects in the prior measurement year and a total fund balance. This report will be provided within 60 days following one year of the effective date and every year forward until the upgrades are complete. MOU at 4.

9. On a biennial basis, GMP will review TGFOV projections and the actual costs of TGFOV upgrades, and at the same time will revisit the TGFOV fee, considering whether an increase or decrease in the fee is warranted. GMP will memorialize this review and submit its first summary to the parties to this matter no later than 60 days following two years after the effective date and every two years thereafter until completed. In the event a tariff change is warranted, GMP will file the request with the Commission after sharing it with the other parties. MOU at 4-5.

10. GMP will administer and collect the TGFOV fee in two different ways. In the case of projects that require additional system upgrades, the TGFOV fee will be added to the total cost of such upgrades and paid before interconnection. For projects that do not have additional upgrade costs, the TGFOV fee will be applied to the customer's first bill following interconnection of the generation system. MOU at 5.

11. Once GMP has completed all TGFOV upgrades and collected the funds to cover the full cost of the upgrades, GMP will discontinue the collection of the TGFOV fee. Castonguay Letter at 3.

## **B. Discussion**

The interconnection of a new generation resource can cause a circuit's load-to-generation ratio to fall below acceptable limits, creating the potential for TGFOV.<sup>7</sup> This condition often requires upgrades to the distribution system or other work to maintain system stability and reliability. Traditionally, a new generation resource is required to pay for the costs of all work necessary to safely interconnect the new generation resource to the grid.<sup>8</sup> However, the cost of TGFOV mitigation is cost-prohibitive for small generation resources to undertake and, as a result, these projects often must be abandoned. If a proposed generation resource is abandoned, the responsibility for TGFOV can shift from project to project because the responsibility for the cost of interconnection is determined by a generation resource's position in the interconnection queue.

GMP represents that a project can wait as long as two years between study completion and project commissioning, which can result in system upgrades being delayed for nearly as long. This scenario creates uncertainty for all projects in the queue as to who will be responsible for the cost of TGFOV mitigation, and when the responsible project will undertake the TGFOV upgrades. In summary, the application of the Commission's traditional cost-allocation method for interconnection costs can cause delays and uncertainty when many small generation resources are seeking to interconnect where there is a TGFOV issue.<sup>9</sup>

GMP's proposal would address this situation by socializing the cost of TGFOV mitigation among all generators that interconnect to affected circuits. GMP's proposed solution is creative but not consistent with Commission Rules 5.507(G)(5), 5.506(E), and 5.132, which stipulate that a generation resource is responsible for the costs of all work necessary to safely

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<sup>7</sup> Department Comments of May 31, 2019, at 3.

<sup>8</sup> Commission Rule 5.132 ("The applicant bears the costs of all equipment necessary to interconnect the net-metering system to the distribution grid and any distribution system upgrades necessary to ensure system stability and reliability. The applicant bears the costs of all equipment necessary to interconnect the net-metering system to the distribution grid and any distribution system upgrades necessary to ensure system stability and reliability."); Commission Rule 5.506(E) ("The date- and time-stamp of the Application will be used to determine the cost responsibility for any System Upgrades necessary to accommodate the interconnection."); Commission Rule 5.507(G)(5) ("Where additional facilities, Interconnection Facilities, or System Upgrades are required to permit the interconnection of a Generation Resource, the Interconnection Requester shall bear the entire cost of such facilities.").

<sup>9</sup> At a certain size, generation resources usually plan for some interconnection costs and this issue does not arise.

interconnect that system, based on the generation resource's position in the queue. For example, Commission Rule 5.507(G)(5) states that:

Where additional facilities, Interconnection Facilities, or System Upgrades are required to permit the interconnection of a Generation Resource, the Interconnection Requester shall bear the entire cost of such facilities.

Under these rule-based cost-allocation standards, generation resources are required to pay the "entire cost" of interconnection improvements and are not assigned a portion of the costs necessary to interconnect other generation resources.

The proposed tariff also goes beyond the scope of Rule 5.507(G)(6), which provides that:

An Interconnecting Utility may propose to group facilities required for more than one Interconnection Requester in order to minimize facilities' costs through economies of scale, but any Interconnection Requester may require the installation of facilities required for its own Generation Resource if it is willing to pay the costs of those facilities.

The tariff would allow GMP to group facilities (such as TGFOV mitigation facilities) that are not required for more than one Interconnection Requester. For example, a circuit could be TGFOV-constrained due to a single proposed generation resource, but the cost of the TGFOV mitigation would be funded by numerous projects that do not require that mitigation facility. Additionally, GMP's proposal does not "minimize the facilities' cost through economies of scale" because the cost of TGFOV mitigation will be unchanged by the tariff; the only change is who pays for it. Some generation resources could pay more than the actual cost of TGFOV mitigation under the tariff.<sup>10</sup> GMP has proposed that generation resources that applied for a CPG before the effective date of the tariff could choose to pay the actual cost of TGFOV mitigation or the fee, but this option is not available to generation resources that apply after the effective date of the tariff.<sup>11</sup>

This discussion is not intended as criticism of the tariff. The Commission's interconnection rule was adopted in 2006, before the widespread adoption of net-metering systems and other distributed generation plants. The strict application of these rules to novel

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<sup>10</sup> GMP Response to Commission Information Requests, dated June 18, 2019, at 1-2.

<sup>11</sup> See Tariff at Revised Sheet 20 ("Net metering systems that have an active application or registration for interconnection on hold prior to July 1, 2019 due to a transmission ground-fault overvoltage issue and have not already agreed to pay for the cost of the transmission ground-fault overvoltage upgrade may continue the interconnection process by paying the fee.").

circumstances has the potential to produce outcomes that are contrary to the public interest, such as the significant delays in the interconnection of new renewable generation described by GMP in its request to adopt the tariff. Therefore, the Commission concludes that in order to approve the tariff, it is necessary to waive the provisions of Commission Rules 5.500 and 5.100 that would normally govern the allocation of TGFOV mitigation costs to the individual project that gives rise to the need for such work.

The Commission can grant limited waivers of its rules where not prohibited by law and for good cause shown.<sup>12</sup> However, regulatory agencies are prohibited from granting routine waivers of their rules.<sup>13</sup> The Commission finds good cause to allow GMP to deviate from the applicable provisions of Commission Rules 5.500 and 5.100 because the tariff will facilitate the timely interconnection of distributed generation resources, which is consistent with the State's goal of "[p]roviding support and incentives to locate renewable energy plants of small and moderate size in a manner that is distributed across the State's electric grid."<sup>14</sup> At the same time, the tariff is broadly consistent with the intent of the Commission's cost-allocation methodology because the entities proposing new generation resources, and not ratepayers, will pay for the cost of interconnecting new generation. The Commission notes that this waiver is limited and applies only to the cost of TGFOV mitigation on circuits identified by GMP. All other interconnection costs will continue to be allocated pursuant to Commission Rules 5.500 and 5.100.

The Commission does not accept All Earth's recommendation that TGFOV mitigation costs be socialized among all ratepayers because it is not consistent with sound distribution planning policy. The Commission agrees with the Department that system planning should "optimiz[e] and maximiz[e] the use of existing infrastructure."<sup>15</sup> Socializing the cost of TGFOV upgrades would provide no incentive to new generation resources to avoid areas of the grid that require costly upgrades. In contrast to All Earth's recommendation, GMP's proposal does not materially deviate from the principle that the cost-causer pays but distributes the costs of TGFOV mitigation more evenly than the current approach.

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<sup>12</sup> Commission Rule 2.107.

<sup>13</sup> 3 V.S.A. § 845(b).

<sup>14</sup> 30 V.S.A. § 8000(a)(7).

<sup>15</sup> Department Comments of May 31, 2019, at 3.

Finally, the Commission turns to the Department's recommendation that the TGFOV fee be designated as non-bypassable in GMP's net-metering tariff. GMP responded that it would make whatever revisions to its tariff are necessary, pending the outcome of the Commission's review of GMP's multi-year regulation plan, which involved the question of whether certain charges could be designated non-bypassable under Commission Rule 5.103. On May 24, 2019, the Commission issued a final order in that proceeding and held that a utility could designate charges in addition to those listed as examples in Commission Rule 5.103 as non-bypassable, subject to Commission approval.<sup>16</sup> GMP is directed to file a revised net-metering tariff that designates the TGFOV fee as non-bypassable.

#### IV. ACCOUNTING ORDER

Pursuant to 30 V.S.A. § 221, the Commission is authorized to "prescribe the forms of all books, accounts, papers and records of any public utility over which it has jurisdiction." The Commission considers granting an accounting order when a transaction is determined to be extraordinary, meaning it is "abnormally and significantly different from the ordinary and typical activities of the company and which would not reasonably be expected in the foreseeable future."<sup>17</sup> The Commission uses this standard and considers the following criteria in determining whether to grant an accounting order allowing for regulatory treatment of identified expenses: (1) the amount is material, (2) the event was unplanned, (3) the event was beyond management's control, and (4) the problem is unusual, abnormal, and not likely to be repeated.

GMP's request for an accounting order meets these criteria. The dollars concerned are material – the average cost of TGFOV mitigation is estimated at \$75,000 per substation, and GMP has identified 67 substations that will require TGFOV mitigation. The TGFOV mitigation is unplanned and outside GMP's control because individual generation resources traditionally bear these costs, and this tariff-based solution will temporarily shift the burden and the costs to GMP, to be funded by a broader class of generation resources through the tariff. Finally, the need to account for TGFOV mitigation costs is unusual, abnormal, and not likely to be repeated because GMP has represented that once a circuit has been upgraded to address TGFOV, no

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<sup>16</sup> *Petition of Green Mountain Power Corporation for approval of a multi-year regulation plan pursuant to 30 V.S.A. § 209, 218, and 218d*, Case No. 18-1633-PET, Order of 5/24/2019, at 24.

<sup>17</sup> *Central Vermont Public Service Corporation Rate Investigation*, Docket 6946/6988, Order of 3/29/05 at 54.

additional TGFOV mitigation will be necessary in the future.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, it will only be necessary to use this accounting guidance until all TGFOV upgrades are completed and GMP has recouped those costs. Accordingly, the Commission authorizes GMP to use the fees collected under the TGFOV tariff to fund TGFOV mitigation for all GMP circuits and substations that require it, applying the following accounting guidance:

1. Construction costs associated with TGFOV upgrades, including internal labor, contractors, materials, and the related overheads will be applied to an individual capital project. All costs will be captured in Account 1070 – Construction Work in Process. GMP will not “mark up” these upgrades in any respect beyond its general overhead allocation applied to all work.
2. As construction of TGFOV projects is completed, project costs will be reviewed to ensure all costs are captured and complete, and a journal entry will be made by the finance team to transfer the completed construction costs to a Regulatory Asset Account. A debit equal to total construction costs will be made to Account 1823 – Other Regulatory Assets, and a credit equal to total construction costs will be made to Account 1070 – Construction Work in Progress.
3. Reimbursement for TGFOV upgrades via tariff collection will be charged to the following accounts in amounts equal to the TGFOV fee, based on the size of the project: debit – Account 1310 - Cash, and credit – Account 1823 – Other Regulatory Assets.
4. A monthly journal entry will be recorded to apply the interest component to the balance in Account 1823 – Other Regulatory Assets. The interest represents the return on the Regulatory Assets account. The monthly entry will consist of the average monthly balance  $((\text{beginning balance} + \text{ending balance})/2)$  in the account before the interest entry multiplied by GMP’s credit facility current monthly interest rate. The accounting entry to record this transaction is as follows: debit – Account 1823 – Other Regulatory Assets, and credit – Account 4190 – Interest Income.
5. On a biennial basis, GMP will review TGFOV projections and the actual costs of TGFOV upgrades, and at the same time will revisit the TGFOV fee, considering whether

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<sup>18</sup> GMP Responses to Hearing Officer Information Request, dated June 18, 2019, at 2.

an increase or decrease in the fee is warranted. GMP will memorialize this review and submit its first summary to the parties to this Docket no later than 60 days following two years after the effective date and every two years thereafter until completed. In the event a tariff change is warranted, GMP will file the request with the Commission after sharing it with the other parties.

#### **V. CONCLUSION**

Based on the foregoing findings and discussion, the Commission finds that GMP's proposed TGFOV fee and new generation resource rider is just and reasonable. The Commission approves GMP's request for an accounting order to implement the TGFOV fee.

#### **VI. ORDER**

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED, ADJUDGED, AND DECREED by the Vermont Public Utility Commission ("Commission") that:

1. Pursuant to the Commission's accounting authority provided in 30 V.S.A. § 221 over the books and accounts of utilities subject to its jurisdiction, Green Mountain Power Corporation ("GMP") may book the accounting entries as prescribed herein.
2. GMP's new Generation Resource System Upgrade Rider submitted in this case on May 16, 2019, and its revised Self-Generation and Net Metering tariff submitted in this case on June 6, 2019, shall take effect on July 1, 2019.
3. GMP shall file in this proceeding a revised net-metering tariff that designates the TGFOV fee as a non-bypassable charge.

SO ORDERED

Dated at Montpelier, Vermont this 1st day of July, 2019

	)	
Anthony Z. Roisman	)	PUBLIC UTILITY
	)	
	)	
Margaret Cheney	)	COMMISSION
	)	
	)	
Sarah Hoffmann	)	OF VERMONT

OFFICE OF THE CLERK

Filed: July 1, 2019

Attest:   
Clerk of the Commission

*Notice to Readers: This decision is subject to revision of technical errors. Readers are requested to notify the Clerk of the Commission (by e-mail, telephone, or in writing) of any apparent errors, in order that any necessary corrections may be made. (E-mail address: puc.clerk@vermont.gov)*

*Appeal of this decision to the Supreme Court of Vermont must be filed with the Clerk of the Commission within 30 days. Appeal will not stay the effect of this Order, absent further order by this Commission or appropriate action by the Supreme Court of Vermont. Motions for reconsideration or stay, if any, must be filed with the Clerk of the Commission within 28 days of the date of this decision and Order.*

PUC Case No. 19-0441-TF - SERVICE LIST

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